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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: REGIONAL CONFLICTS, LEBANON VIOLENCE, OMAN
ELECTIONS

¶1. SUMMARY: "Oman" government daily compares crises in Somalia and Sudan to violence in Palestine and Iraq; also says national reconciliation in Lebanon is more vital than ever; privately owned "al Watan" says that election Majlis al Shura candidates on a tribal basis is not a solution to challenges in Oman's elections. Violence in Lebanon receives consistent coverage in all dailies. A Women in Business conference in Muscat also receives some local press coverage. END SUMMARY.

COVERAGE

¶2. The "Nahr al Barid" violence in Lebanon captured pride-of-place in Omani dailies this week. On June 2 and 3, all English-language dailies and the "Al-Shabiba" (youth-oriented, privately owned, circulation 20,000) reported on a "Women in Business" conference that the Embassy participated in.

BLOCK QUOTES: SOMALIA/DARFUR LIKE IRAQ/PALESTINE

¶3. On May 31, government-owned "Oman" (circulation 38,000) worried about the spread of conflict in East Africa and the Arab world in an editorial entitled "Regional Conflicts and Sustainable Development":

"Armed conflicts that spread to several places in a region should be stopped and solved on a logical and just basis...The Arab-Israeli conflict should be solved for good, and there should be peaceful co-existence in other countries of the world, especially the conflicts in Iraq that result from sectarianism. What is happening in Iraq and Palestine is a replay of what is going on in Somalia and Darfur. The unexcused external interference in Sudan's affairs indicates that these conflicts are in a chronic political state. The international community must exercise its collective will to end these conflicts and bring hope to the peoples of these countries. There must be efforts to achieve development and stability in these places that is far away from the language of violence and destruction."

LEBANESE RECONCILIATION "MORE VITAL THAN EVER"

¶4. "Oman" published a piece on June 3 entitled "Lebanon Facing Difficult Challenges":

"It is very important for a majority of Lebanese including Saad al Hariri, the representative of a future political wing, to call for Lebanese reconciliation and fraternity with Hezbollah...they must bypass the dangerous state of polarity and provide a proper degree of cooperation between Lebanese parties, so that there can be a proper framework through which to deal with current developments in Lebanon including the international tribunal [over Rafiq al Hariri's assassination]. A Lebanese national dialogue is more vital than ever before, despite disagreements that various regional players may have with the country...lending support to the Lebanese is vital not only on the level of the Arab League, but also when it comes to Lebanon's bilateral relations with other Arab states."

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ILLITERACY NOT MAIN PROBLEM FOR OMANI ELECTIONS
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15. On June 4, "Al-Watan" (privately owned daily, circulation 42,000) columnist Abdulla Bahjaj commented on Oman's "Al Shura Council and Tribalism":

"Why are some people trying to use illiteracy as an excuse to influence the voters' choice for the best nominee among the 717 candidates in the 2007 Majlis al Shura elections? Illiteracy is a challenge to the process, but the solution is not simply to elect members on a tribal basis...From the very beginning, we did not accept the notion that the Majlis al Shura's inability to exercise legislative authority was due to the fact that a third of its members are illiterate...illiteracy shouldn't be a distraction from addressing some of the other issues that prevent the Majlis from becoming a legislative entity, like nomination requirements...at present, candidates must retire from their present jobs to take a Majlis seat. But if people are given the opportunity to return to

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their jobs after their tenure in the Majlis, then we will get candidates that are more qualified."

GRAPPO